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STATE FOR E, EB, EB/TPP AND EAP/K
COMMERCE FOR 4431/MAC/OPB/EAP/DUTTON
TREASURY FOR IA/ISA/DOHNER AND BUCKLEY
USDA ALSO FOR FAS/ITP/CLAUS AND GRUNENFELDER
NSC FOR SHIRZAD, HUNTER, CHA AND COLLINS
GENEVA FOR USTR

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: KORUS FTA: A LOOK AT KOREAN PUBLIC OPINION

SUMMARY

[¶](#)1. Generally speaking, the Korean public remains noticeably supportive of the conclusion of a U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement despite steady public protests and often-critical media coverage. The proportion of citizens who feel strongly about the initiative is relatively small, however, so there is still potential for public opinion to sway in one direction or the other depending on the outcome of the negotiations. Korea's "silent majority" of FTA sympathizers is most supportive about changes to Korea's services market, and is agreeable to opening wider to imported manufactured goods. The public is most cautious about the impact of the FTA on the agricultural sector. End Summary.

WIDESPREAD SUPPORT IN GENERAL PUBLIC

[¶](#)2. As one might expect, different polls show different results concerning Korean public opinion toward the KORUS FTA. Korean public opinion polls still often include leading questions, or questions asked in a context that provides information pointing toward a particular point of view. Even so, it is clear that even after three months of intense media coverage and a steady drumbeat of public demonstrations opposing the FTA, the Korean public remains largely supportive of the endeavor. Even polls commissioned by anti-FTA organizations such as Hankyoreh Shinmun show majority support.

Recent Poll Results

(percent)	Favor	Oppose	Undecided
June 3 Media Research	58.1	29.2	12.7
June 3 KBS	40.0	23.0	37.0
May 13 Hankyoreh	58.1	41.9	0.0
April 25 KSOI	39.5	55.2	5.3

[¶](#)3. The most recent truly reliable survey was conducted by Media Research on behalf of the Hankook Ilbo newspaper, which tends to take a skeptical view toward the benefits of foreign trade. That survey of 1,000 adults, conducted on

June 3, found 7.1 percent of the Korean public to be "very supportive, 51 percent "tending to support," 22.5 percent "tending to oppose," and 6.7 percent "very negative." Based on these results, it is apparent that a large group of Korean citizenry may not have firmly fixed opinions about the free trade agreement. The implications of this fact are far-reaching: based on events and negotiating outcomes, it may be possible for large cohorts of Korean citizens to change their minds about the KORUS FTA.

¶4. Following are the highlights of some other opinion polls, as reported in the press.

-- Korea Broadcasting Service (June 3): According to KBS' nationwide survey of 1,000 adults, 39 percent supported the FTA while 22 percent objected to the trade deal. However, as much as 36 percent were found to neither support nor oppose. As reasons to approve the trade pact, 45 percent of the respondents said the FTA would enhance the competitiveness of domestic industries, and 31 percent answered that it would help reinvigorate the economy. Among the opponents, 43 percent said that if the FTA is concluded, the ROK economy could be subordinated to the U.S. influence, and 25 percent responded that Seoul is pushing for the FTA talks in great haste. Asked about the sectors that should be opened, 48 percent picked social services, 37 percent agriculture, stockbreeding and fisheries, and 13 percent manufacturing industries. On the contrary, 78 percent and 13 percent chose agriculture, stockbreeding and fisheries, and social services, respectively, as the sectors that should stay closed.

-- Hankyoreh Shinmun (May 13): The newspaper and the Korean Social Science Data Center asked questions about the FTA as part of its biennial "Survey of Koreans' Ideological Inclinations." Regarding the KORUS FTA, 58.1 percent of Koreans supported the pact while 41.9 percent expressed objections. 66.7 percent of people in agricultural, forestry and fisheries sectors opposed the trade accord, as opposed to 67.3 percent of self-employed persons who supported the pact.

-- JoongAng Ilbo (April 20): A public poll conducted by JoongAng Ilbo, the East Asia Institute and Hankook Research reported found that more than 60 percent of the public supports a free trade agreement with the United States. The consortium has yet to release detailed results, however.

-- Korea Society Opinion Institute (April 25): The KSOI conducted a nationwide survey of about 700 people. In the survey, 72 percent of respondents said that they would support the Korea opening up its medical and educational markets, despite strong opposition from civic groups. Many respondents also approved of the liberalization of law and accounting (65 percent) and other services sectors (62 percent). However, those polled were split over the opening-up of the film industry, with 45 percent in favor and 43 percent against it. As to the liberalization of the agriculture and livestock industry, 67 percent was opposed to the opening with a mere 29 percent in favor -- the only category where objectors outnumbered supporters.

¶5. Overall, the KSOI study found that 55.2 percent of the citizenry was opposed to the KORUS FTA, while 39.5 percent supported the trade pact. As to why respondents tended to support each category for market opening but opposed the FTA in general, KSOI research fellow Han Ki-young concluded, "A large number of the respondents seem to identify agriculture market opening with the FTA."

COHORT ANALYSIS

¶6. The KSOI study was particularly useful because it has released its results broken down by survey cohort. By stratum, KSOI found that people in their 30's and younger, highly educated and with high-paying white-collar jobs were the most likely to favor the FTA. Meanwhile, those in their

50's and older, and those less-educated with lower-paying jobs, were more likely to be opposed to the trade deal.

17. The cohort analysis can be taken further, for example to look at two sectors of particular importance to the KORUS FTA -- agriculture and automobiles.

18. In the case of the agricultural market, there is a clear political orientation to the stance of members of the public. Members of the more urban ruling Uri Party and the conservative Grand National Party are most likely to support agricultural market opening, while supporters of the Jeolla-based Democratic Party and the left-wing Democratic Labor Party are firmly opposed. Interestingly, however, there is little divergence in opinion by educational attainment, with fairly strong opposition to liberalization among all cohorts:

What Is Your Opinion on Opening the Agricultural Market?

(percent)	Favor	Oppose	Undecided
Uri Party	34.7	62.4	2.9
Grand National Party	32.6	62.8	4.6
Democratic Party	21.6	74.3	4.1
Democratic Labor Party	12.9	87.1	0.0
Independent	28.7	66.4	4.9
University or Higher	30.7	67.1	2.2
High School	27.0	70.0	3.0
Middle School or Below	29.4	58.2	12.4

19. Conversely, concerning automotive market opening, there appears to be less of a political tinge to public opinion, based on party affiliation. There is, however, a clear class-based pattern of Korea's well-educated being the most favorably disposed toward the idea of importing more cars. Blue collar citizens with less educational attainment are less supportive of the idea of having more imported automobiles on Korea's streets. The cause could be concern about lost employment, or jealousy over not being able to afford "expensive" imported cars:

What Is Your Opinion on Opening the Automobile Market?

(percent)	Favor	Oppose	Undecided
Uri Party	63.2	32.5	4.3
Grand National Party	65.5	28.3	6.2
Democratic Party	49.2	44.1	6.7
Democratic Labor Party	64.8	33.6	1.6
Independent	53.1	35.5	11.4
University or Higher	69.8	26.5	3.7
High School	53.7	39.3	7.0
Middle School or Below	45.9	37.3	16.8

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